

Occasional Paper: 'How Tartan is Your Text?'

Stuart Kelly

Two contrasting news stories from last year exemplify the extent to which 'Scottish Literature' is still a debatable territory. In January 2008, the National Library of Congress in America responded to pressure from the Scottish Government, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library and the American Modern Language Association and dropped proposals to reclassify all Scottish works as 'English'. Under the system that had been envisaged, Robert Burns, for example, would move from 'Scottish Poetry' to a catalogue and shelving reference of 'English Poetry, Scottish Authors'. Then in March 2009, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland, announced that under their new guidelines students would have to read at least one text from their 'nation', 'to ensure that young people in England are guaranteed access to their own literary heritage, as are students in Wales and Northern Ireland'. This prompted the headline in *The Guardian* 'Scottish literature cut out of English GCSE syllabus'. Within a single year, there were media outcries over Scottish Literature being denied recognition as a separate tradition and over Scottish Literature being denied recognition as part of a wider tradition. In an interview with James Kelman, published in *The Herald* on April 25 2009, Paul Dalgarno wrote

On his return to the table, I mention a personal bugbear. As with writers such as Janice Galloway and Alasdair Gray, Kelman's work can be difficult to find. In Waterstone's, for example, his books are not where they should be: the K section of the fiction shelves. Galloway and Gray are not under G. Instead they are annexed in a separate section under Scottish literature. 'It's part of the old imperial legacy that we're marginalised in our own country', says Kelman. 'Our work isn't classified as literature, even in Scotland – it's classified as Scottish'.

Ironically, Waterstone's had actually integrated the 'Scottish Fiction' section back into 'Fiction' in February 2009. This decision by Waterstone's prompted an angry response from a group of Scottish writers (including Janice Galloway and Alan Warner), who had, in 2005, opposed Waterstone's takeover of rival chain Ottakar's on the basis that it would lessen the prominence given to Scottish books.

If little else, the debate has moved on from T. S. Eliot's deliberately provocative question, posed in *The Athenaeum* in August 1919, 'Was there a Scottish Literature?' A deluge of books have been published in the last five years that assert the existence of Scottish Literature as, if not a separate, distinct and discrete entity, then at the very least an acknowledged field of study. There have been no fewer than five histories of Scottish Literature: Carl MacDougall's *Writing Scotland* (Polygon Birlinn, 2004); *Alba Literaria: A History of Scottish Literature*, edited by Marco Fazzini (Amos Edizioni, 2005); Roderick Watson's two-volume *The Literature of Scotland* (Palgrave, 1984 revised 2007); the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, edited by Ian Brown, Thomas Owen Clancy, Susan Manning and Murray Pittock in three volumes (Edinburgh University Press, 2007) and *Scotland's Books* by Robert Crawford (Penguin, 2008). Critical monographs include Gerard Carruthers' *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009); *Contemporary Scottish Literature: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* by Matt McGuire (Palgrave, 2009); the *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, edited by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), the *Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, edited by Bill Bell in four volumes (Edinburgh University Press, 2007-9) and *Why Scottish Literature Matters* by Carla Sassi (The Saltire Society, 2005). The *Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels* published its final volumes in 2009, and the equally voluminous *Stirling / South Carolina Research Edition of the Collected Works of James Hogg* is approaching completion. *Duanaire na Scaicre*, published by Birlinn in 2007, concluded their impressive five-volume anthology of Gaelic poetry from its earliest times to the present day. In addition, almost all the major writers that were associated with the mid-twentieth century 'Scottish Renaissance' (with the notable and lamentable exception of Sydney Goodsir Smith) are now available in collected, foot-noted, and sensitively edited formats. For the student approaching 'Scottish Literature', texts, a critical framework and a level of debate are now present in a manner very different from a generation ago.

That said, the miasma of ambiguity has not wholly evaporated: it might even be argued that such a breathless flurry of publications actually implies a desperate and persistent need to assert the existence of Scottish literature. What is the collective noun for a diversity? Scottish academia insists on its 'Albattitude' to the extent that deep-reading is foregone in favour of a desperate screaming of 'meherelammetoo'. While other literary cultures discuss the pleasure, the

carnavalesque, the difficulty and triumph, the *olio-podrida* of reading, the Scots stick with a great Yahweh-ish 'I AM'.

Indeed, most of the histories of Scottish literature begin by anxiously questioning their own validity. The problem remains one of definition, and every definition that can be advanced is partial. These include 'books written by people born in Scotland' (which would exclude James Robertson and Burns Singer), 'books written in Scotland' (which would include Orwell's *1984* and, famously, *Harry Potter* but exclude Spark's *Memento Mori* and Byron's *Don Juan*) and books 'about' or 'set' in Scotland (which would include Charles Jennings's *Faintheart* and Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* but exclude A.L. Kennedy's *Everything You Need* and John Buchan's *Sick Heart River*). Some writers – especially the Canadians Alice Munro and Alistair Macleod – have been co-opted as honorary Scots based on ancestry and a nebulous 'sensitivity'; an accolade never afforded to Ian McEwan or Michael Crichton. Often the delineation of the Scottish 'field of enquiry' can seem perilously similar to the Indian Dad on BBC's *Goodness Gracious Me*. A soft combination of all feasible definitions, refined by the whim or aesthetic predilections of the critic, seems to hold sway in most accounts. A subtler variation of this – espoused by Gerard Carruthers and Cairns Craig – is the assertion that all national histories have been revealed as artificial rather than natural constructs, so Scotland is no different in being self-reflexive. A similar argument is put forward by Carla Sassi, where the problematic nature of defining the field is seen as the intellectual justification for studying the field. The rest of the world is the same, the argument goes, but we are more blatantly the same. Being self-consciously anomalous makes us potentially typical.

This segues neatly with the rise in post-colonial readings of Scottish literature (Homi Bhabha is cited more frequently than any other theorist in Schoene's *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*). The 'post-colonial turn' in Scottish criticism was ably critiqued by Liam Connell in 'Modes of Marginality: Scottish Literature and the Uses of Postcolonial Theory', and indeed the Scottish claims to postcolonial status had already been questioned in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989. This leads to what might be called Postcolonialism 2.0, where Scotland's lack of evident colony status, complicity with Imperialism and internal displacements and tensions are thought to make it *even more* pliable to 'post-colonial' analysis. As Stefanie Lehner writes 'paradoxically, it is its examination by and within a British-metropolitan template that has led to an accentuation of Scotland's anomalous historical development and emphasised its affinity with post-colonial cultures'. Secondly, the increase of interest in the work of John Macmurray, the Scottish communitarian moral philosopher whose work was influential of the thinking on Tony Blair, seems relevant. Schoene describes Macmurray's work as 'striking in its anticipation of deconstructionist discourse as well as much

influential postcolonial theory' and '[Scotland's] own indigenous theoretical resource'. Why, exactly, Macmurray's place of birth should be of importance is uncertain, and the suspicion therefore exists that the discovery of a 'native' strain of theoretics can be used to counter accusations of expedient adoption of theoretics developed elsewhere in the world. In his use of Macmurray, Cairns Craig (writes Schoene) 'puts a definitive end to a critical tradition of tautologically measuring all things Scottish by their degree of "Scottishness"'.

That is not to say that the 'how tartan is this text' approach has vanished overnight, and the historical volumes listed above amply demonstrate that the 'rediscovery' of Scottish texts still has some critical purchase. Robert Crawford pays particular attention to writing in Latin, and figures such as John Barclay (1582-1621), whose *Argenis* is singled out for its centrality to the development of prose fiction in Europe and claimed as the 'first Scottish novel'. Curiously, Crawford pays little attention to the allegorical aspects of *Argenis*, dealing, as they do, predominately with London and French affairs. The first volume of the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* pushes back further into the earliest examples of writing in this part of the world. Enshrining the research and approach which Thomas Owen Clancy pioneered in *The Triumph Tree*, the new history devotes significant attention to literature before 1314, including Norse skalds, early Gaelic, the Welsh *Y Gododdin* and French *Fergus of Galloway*, Latin hagiography and (in Sassi's account but not the *Edinburgh History*) the Vindolanda Epistles from Hadrian's Wall. Even the otherwise conventional *Alba Literaria* opens with Michael Scotus, whose *vagrans* career has appealed to the continentally inflected Kenneth White. Across all these histories, a common foundation myth appears, wrapped in the deconstruction of foundation myths: that of a polyglot, diverse Scotland, a Scotland of shifting territorial or linguistic boundaries. In effect, a proto-post-colonial Scotland.

The inclusions may create an atmosphere of inclusivity, but what of the exclusions? The most glaring omission in the *Edinburgh History* (which is structured as individual essays rather than continuous prose) is the lack of any specific essay on the work of Sir Thomas Urquhart. Given Urquhart's translation of Rabelais, and Rabelais' importance to the theorist most beloved of Scottish critics prior to the postcolonial turn – Mikhail Bakhtin – this omission is inexplicable. In fact, a New Historicist reading of Urquhart that re-establishes his relationship with other prose writers of the day, rather than reading him as a deliberate eccentric, is sorely needed. Crawford's *Scotland's Books* is by far the most diligent and imaginative in filling-in gaps in the traditional canon – and the bravest in including works such as Veronica Forrest-Thomson's *Twelve Academic Questions* and Helen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo* (usually overlooked for more obvious reasons). MacDougall's book, being a TV tie-in, is least embarrassed of its omissions, although one at least – Thomas Carlyle, mentioned merely en passant – seems curiously

prescient when one reads Michael Gardiner's essay in the *Edinburgh Guide to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, with its peculiar reference to 'the blankness in literary culture from the 1830s to the 1890s'.

One writer whose liminal inclusion/exclusion is of particular interest is James Thomson, the Ednam-born author of *The Seasons* who, every history reminds us, went to London and wrote 'Rule Britannia'. Everyone feels obliged to mention Thomson, though usually they do so, as the Oxford lady purportedly said when voting Liberal, while holding their noses. Watson says that Thomson's appeal to the Romantics – defined, unspokenly, as Wordsworth and Coleridge – was important but that 'with this, Thomson passes into the history of literature in England'. That is a deeply perplexing statement, made more so by the observation, repeated in Crawford, that Thomson is important as an influence on Alasdair MacMhaighster Alasdair and Robert Burns. One wonders if *Quentin Durward's* influence on Dumas makes Scott pass into the history of literature in France, albeit briefly. Carruthers gives a more detailed analysis of Thomson, but his reading is again bedevilled by quasi-nationalist misgivings. Carruthers, unsurprisingly, takes lines 880 to 901 of 'Autumn' to represent Thomson's feelings about Scotland and Scottishness, from 'See Caledonia in romantic view –' through to the couplet '(As well unhappy Wallace can attest / Great patriot-hero! ill-requited chief!)'. Carruthers anachronistically claims that English readers would be more accustomed to thinking of Wallace as a 'terrorist' – a term introduced by Burke half a century later. The textual history of the poem makes it even more problematic.

The original version of 'Summer' in 1727 had a paean to British heroes, which was expanded throughout later editions, but began with a balancing rejoinder where Thomson writes 'Rapt I might sing thy Caledonian sons, / A gallant, warlike, unsubmitting race!' who are 'not to their own realms confined / but into foreign countries shooting far, / As over Europe bursts the Boreal Morn'. In 1730, the 'praise of Scotland' section was moved to 'Autumn', so that the British heroes section became uniformly English. Moreover, the lines in parentheses that Carruthers ends his quote with cut across the sense of the poem. Line 899 reads 'Who still through bleeding ages struggled hard' going on in 902 and following

To hold a generous undiminished state,
Too much in vain! Hence, of unequal bounds
Impatient, and by tempting glory borne
O'er every land, for every land their life
Has flowed profuse, their piercing genius planned,
And swelled the pomp of peace their faithful toil.

The rhetoric here has moved from acquiescently British to proactively British: the Union has jump-started Scottish international action. The placing in 'Autumn' is also worth examining. Although, post-Keats, it would be tempting to shunt Thomson into a dwam of melancholy about faded glory, 'Autumn' is in fact the season Thomson associates with reaping the ripe benefits of careful planning and judicious choices. The Britishness of Thomson is a far more layered and nuanced affair: take his lines in 'Spring' on the agricultural landscape of the Cheviots again:

...the massy mound
That runs around the hill – the rampart once
Of iron war, in ancient barbarous times,
When disunited Britain ever bled.

That 'disunited' Britain was only 21 years old when Thomson published 'Spring'. The textual vacillations in Thomson's *Seasons* deserve more attention than the brief mentions given in these histories, and even his later works – such as *The Castle of Indolence* – can be read within specific and expansive frameworks. For example: why was the Spenserian Stanza suddenly so important? To what extent were proto-nationalist histories emerging in terms of the varying neoclassicisms, the resurgence of interest in native forms – from Standard Habbie to the Spenserian Stanza, and my all-time-favourite quote in the period, from Thomas Warton's 1774-81 *History of English Poetry*: 'dragons are a sure sign of orientalism' – to the ways in which aesthetic difference and national difference were becoming codified? Why does Thomson's *Alfred: A Masque* receive minimal critical interrogation (not even with the current swing back towards the work of antiquarians) but Home's *Douglas* does?

I should now play my trump card: I am not an academic, I am the Literary Editor for *Scotland on Sunday*. The reason I feel the need to bring the personal into the supposedly impersonal academic essay is that the book that intrigues me most of all these is the *Edinburgh Guide to Contemporary Scottish Literature*. I opened with a salvo of quotations from the media about Scottish writing, and moved to this weird rash of histories and critical handbooks. I mentioned the 'how tartan is this text' question because it is a day to day problem for me: does Ali Smith deserve a lead more than Joyce Carol Oates? Does a new collection by Robert Crawford weigh more in terms of our readership, our space, our expertise, our time-scale for the piece than a review of Roger McGough or Sharon Olds or Jen Hadfield or Yang Lian? What role does the media play in the debate about the future of Scottish literature? Are we the shock-troops, asked to confront new writing without the benefit of a bibliography, or the lag-behinds, always catching up on academe's citation machine?

So, in the interests of full and frank disclosure I should say that firstly, I know the authors being discussed. Contrary to popular belief most reviewers read a great deal, and given the smallness of Scotland (one of the few countries where playing 'Six Degrees of Separation' stops at two rounds), I have also met, interviewed and become friends with many of the subjects of these essays. It also raises the question about the precise nature of canon-formation: who exactly is determining the future canon?

The *Edinburgh Companion* is divided into four sections: contexts, genres, authors and topics. Quite what the difference is between genres and topics eludes me, since, for example, David Stenhouse and Euan Hague's entertaining and informative essay on American Romance novels with Scottish settings seems to describe a genre, rather than a topic, and Christopher Whyte's sketchy but pugnacious 'Twenty-one Collections for the Twenty-first Century' is categorised as an essay on 'genre' (rather than the topic of contemporary poetry). TV drama is a 'genre' and cinema is 'topic'. The back jacket claims that the volume discusses 'the work of solidly established Scottish authors ... alongside that of relative newcomers who have entered the scene over the past ten years or currently emergent writers who are still in the process of getting noticed as part of a new literary avant-garde'. I find the 'new literary avant-garde' claim very difficult to square with the majority of new Scottish texts being published. Indeed, much contemporary Scottish writing has a faintly epigonic feel to it: some phonetic rendition of speech in the manner of Kelman, some *nostalgie de la boue* from Welsh, some typographical shenanigans (so much easier with Word than with typesetting) à la Gray. There is no room in a volume such as this for work by John Aberdein, Andrew Drummond, Jenny Turner, Jen Hadfield, Elaine di Rollo, J O Morgan, Todd McEwen or Lucy Ellmann – indeed, the 'avant-garde' promoted in this volume seems to be which fits and expands the paradigm established by a previous generation and recognised by academia, rather than one which disrupts or destabilises it.

Such a volume also, almost by definition, will be anachronistic by the time it is published. In Gavin Wallace's essay, 'Voyages of Intent', the decision of 'two metropolitan colossi, Penguin and Hodder Headline, to open branches in Scotland' is given as evidence of the strength of Scottish literary culture. Penguin Scotland nevertheless closed in January of 2008; while Hodder Headline has specialised in the commercial sector (although at the time of writing their literary list has begun to expand). Similarly, Stephen Bernstein's article on 'post-millennial' Gray cannot accommodate Gray's most recent fiction (*Old Men In Love*, 2007) which deals gauchely and explicitly with the Iraq War's effect on traditional socialism, nor can David Borthwick's essay deal with A. L. Kennedy's award-winning *Day*, after which his concluding remarks on her recent oeuvre – 'her insistence on providing such strong metanarrative coordinates can often be intrusive, an overshadowing rather than a foreshadowing of her characters' actions and concerns'

– seem rather over-played. ‘Genre writing’ is given due attention, although the hierarchies of genre persists in academia as much as in the wider literary world. Crime fiction – or tartan noir – comes pre-packaged with contemporary relevance. Iain M. Banks, since he sometimes writes without the ‘M’, makes science-fiction acceptable, but equally imaginative works by Matthew Fitt, Charles Stross and Ken MacLeod are not included (MacLeod in particular has recently started exploring distinctively Scottish science-fiction: Michael Cobley, previously a fantasy writers, has also used the tradition of Scottish emigration as a backdrop to interstellar migration). Fantasy writing is still beyond the pale, but work by Ricardo Pinto, Hal Duncan and Alan Campbell is ripe for analysis. Fantasy, as opposed to science-fiction, seems better able to explore ideas relating to religious belief and taboo. In terms of international and critical success, the work of Alan Grant, Grant Morrison and Mark Millar in comic books dwarfs even the success of tartan noir. Morrison has done a great deal to introduce surrealism, ‘wall-breaking’ and an intriguing approach to canonicity to the DC universe and his own author-owned titles. Millar’s sceptical interrogation of heroism in *Superman: Red Son*, *Wanted*, *Chosen*, *1985* and *Kick-ass* seems to align him with various historical re-creations in contemporary Scottish prose literature.

The authors selected for the third section are: Edwin Morgan and Liz Lochhead; Alasdair Gray; James Kelman; Andrew Greig; Christopher Whyte; Iain (M.) Banks; Janice Galloway; Jackie Kay; Irvine Welsh; Kathleen Jamie; Don Paterson; Alan Warner and A. L. Kennedy – a proto-canon of contemporary Scottish writing. The expedience of academic availability seems to determine the selection, rather than any qualitative or quantitative rationale – indeed, even an avowal of subjective preference would be better than the silence shrouding this. Many of the essays are actually very good indeed – I would single out Robert Morace’s piece on Welsh’s *Porno* – but the underlying question won’t go away. Why not commission specific work on Ali Smith and Andrew O’Hagan, the two contemporary Scottish authors most frequently shortlisted for the Booker Prize? My predecessor as literary editor, Andrew Crumey (who contributes a typically mordant essay on the media and Scottish writing) is also a novelist, whose work has been translated almost as much as Janice Galloway’s and Alan Warner’s. (It may be the case that Crumey’s more ‘European’ cerebral fictions, owing more to Borges and Calvino than Buchan and Kelman, is less tractable to nationalistically inflected criticism). Similarly, I was surprised that there was no separate entry on the work on John Burnside, whose evolving mythos is evident in his short stories, novels, poems and memoir: again, Burnside’s earlier novels (as opposed to *The Devil’s Footprints* and *Glister*) are less obviously ‘Scottish’. As always, Frank Kuppner, one of the most idiosyncratic and interesting Scottish writers, whose work perhaps is closest in spirit if not technique to the London writer Iain Sinclair, is barely mentioned.

How does the Scottish canon evolve? The 'Poets' Pub' painting by Alexander Moffat is a self-evident fiction of a literary coterie. There are numerous, now historical, examples of how groups coalesce. When Alexander Trocchi was sending out his first *Sigma* pamphlet, the Scottish authors he singled out were Morgan, Hamilton Finlay, Tom McGrath, Hugh MacDiarmid and Kenneth White: a prototype for a Scottish 'avant-garde' history. Philip Hobsbaum's reading group in Glasgow is frequently described as a catalyst for the 'Glasgow Renaissance', and its membership is taken to have included Gray, Kelman, Tom Leonard, Aonghas Macneacail, Liz Lochhead, and Bernard MacLavery; although more recent interviews have cast doubt on the regularity of the meetings and the self-consciousness of the writers as a coherent 'group' or 'movement'. More archive research on the work of two editors – Peter Kravitz at Polygon, who first published A. L. Kennedy, Kelman, Galloway and Ian Rankin; and Robin Robertson at Jonathan Cape (himself a fine poet not mentioned in this volume) who edits or edited Kennedy, Galloway, Warner and Welsh – might go a long way towards understanding how the so-called 'Scottish Renaissance' came into being. In poetry, the short-lived but influential group 'the Informationists', who published in *Verse*, *Gairfish*, and *Southfields*, and who included Robert Crawford, W. N. Herbert, Richard Price, David Kinloch and others, deserve separate attention, as does the role of Donny O'Rourke's anthology *Dream State*, especially in the difference between the first and second editions.

Literary reviews do give prominence to certain writers – Andrew Crumey discusses in his essay how my colleague Kenny Farquharson's profile of Welsh did a great deal to establish the idea of a 'new wave' of rebellious writers. I was vaguely amused to read in Kirsten Innes' otherwise interesting article about the use of the c-word in contemporary Scottish writing, that one of the authors she discusses – Alan Bissett – had been called 'the new Irvine Welsh'. Flipping to the bibliography, it transpires that this epithet was coined in *The Sun*, a newspaper not known for its literary enthusiasms. Newspaper reviews can be extracted in a misleading manner – the opening sentence will often situate the author in a context, before the meat of the review, and it is not unheard of for publishers to take the 'scene setting' as an endorsement.

Like the histories mentioned above, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* subscribes to a narrative of history, with the devolution votes in 1979 and 1997 accorded a great deal of significance. Liam McIlvanney wrote in *On Modern British Fiction* that 'By the time the Parliament arrived [in 1999], a revival in fiction had long been underway... Without waiting for the politicians, Scottish novelists had written themselves out of despair'. The critic Cairns Craig went one step further: 'The 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century – as though the energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels. In literature, in thought, creative and scholarly work

went hand in hand to redraw the map of Scotland's past and realign the perspectives of the future'. Douglas Gifford makes the connection even more explicitly:

It is tempting to see this change in confidence as somehow related to the 1979 Devolution referendum and the growing assertions of Scottish identity and its varieties that emerged almost in defiance of that quasi-democratic debacle. With this new confidence, Scottish fiction approached the new millennium as a standard bearer for Scottish culture, arguably even supplying the most successful explorations of changing Scottish identities, in a rich variety of voices and genres. The new complexities... relate dynamically to the changes taking place in Scottish society at large, not only reacting to them, but influencing the framework of thought in which they took place.

Lanark becomes the foundation myth of this Renaissance, leading one to wonder what would have happened if it had been published by Quartet in 1976.

The idea that political despair after the 1979 Devolution referendum was alchemically transformed into cultural success is problematic. As Allan Massie perceptively wrote in *The Spectator*, 'talk of a cultural renaissance suggests there was an earlier death in the family. It's hard to see when that was supposed to be'. Any overview of Scottish writing before 1979 – including, for example, Muriel Spark, Archie Hind, Naomi Mitchison and Jessie Kesson, as well as the poets Edwin Morgan, Norman McCaig, Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley Maclean – would suggest it was in rude health before Mrs Thatcher came to power. Tom Leonard was rather more cutting on the idea of a Renaissance, when he asked where our Sistine Chapel was. Likewise, if we accept the idea of the frustrated devolution picture, what happens after 1997, when Scotland did vote for a devolved parliament with tax-varying powers? At the time, there was a mild flurry of concern; akin to the idea that somehow political satire would become superfluous with the change in government. Would Scottish culture lose its 'mobilising grievance'? Some critics thought that devolution would allow for a liberating normality to enter Scottish writing – writers would be able to explore something other than the nature of Scottish identity. In the words of the poet, critic and novelist, Christopher Whyte, 'in the absence of an elected political authority, the task of the representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers... one can hope that the setting up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement'. Others, such as the *Scotsman* literary editor and director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Catherine Lockerbie, were more cautious: 'now devolution has been achieved, people don't have to prove they are Scottish writers anymore... I think we've moved on from the days of the stereotypical writer.'

Young writers don't have to write those quasi-political novels. I think you'll find something more interesting and individual from them, rather than following the old path. The chip on the shoulder has been turned into a twiglet if you like and the Scottish cultural cringe has certainly diminished'. A level of debate and aesthetic confidence no doubt contributed, in an intangible degree, to the success of the 1997 vote: at the same time, the closure of Ravenscraig, the introduction of the poll-tax a year early in Scotland and the collapse of the Conservative vote in Scotland maybe helped as well.

Against this background, it is tempting to think that Schoene's prediction that Scottishness would no longer be the measure of Scottishness would be explicit in the criticism in *The Edinburgh Companion*. In fact, 'to ensure a sense of *telos* within the collection, all contributors were asked... to contextualise their specific readings within an analysis of contemporary Scottish literature's affinity with various pro-, anti- and post-nationalist discourses'. This 'sense of *telos*' is actually an assimilatory process: even when Scottish writers do not engage with nationalist debate, their refusal is taken to be part of that debate. Newspaper reviews may be criticised on a number of grounds, but at least their primary function is to debate the aesthetic merits of the work in question rather than fit it into a tessellation of opinion on nationalism. This 'sense of *telos*' is perilously close to becoming circular reasoning, and the Greek meaning of *telos* – the end, as well as the direction – makes the anthology covertly similar to the conservative historiography of a figure like Fukayama. It tacitly reinforces the picture of literary history as inflected by debates over statehood.

The Index to the volume reinforces this sense of the *Kleinstadtsch* here: the only non-Scottish authors listed (excluding translated authors) are Bataille, Baudelaire, Raymond Chandler, W. E. B. DuBois, T. S. Eliot, Bret Easton Ellis, Seamus Heaney, Alan Hollinghurst, Kafka, Jean Rhys, Rushdie, Ben Okri, Poe, Ezra Pound and J. D. Salinger. Yet the authors discussed in the volume have frequently discussed a far greater and more diverse range of non-Scottish authors: Warner has written on Sadegh Hedayat; Duncan McLean on Knut Hamsun; Ali Smith on Christine Brooke-Rose; Kelman on Ngugi wa'Thiongo and Chinua Achebe; Don Paterson has discussed E. M. Cioran and Ian Rankin gave a rousing appreciation of Thomas Pynchon. Comparative criticism might well be the way for Scottish literature to engage fully with its status as literature, rather than its carapace of Scottishness.

There are still many areas where Scottish Literary Studies lags behind other, more well-established fields of academic enquiry. Particularly in the areas of biography and bibliography much essential work remains to be done – for example, a modern biography of Christopher Grieve is long overdue; a critical edition of the entire works of Galt is lacking; and monographs

revising certain long-held critical shibboleths (the 'lack' of a coherent tradition in the seventeenth century or the nature of the 'Kailyard' and its persistence into popular mid-twentieth century writing such as that of O. Douglas and Annie S. Swann) should be thoroughly examined. The notion that the primary function of studying Scottish literature is to discover its vexed, propagandist or ulterior relationship to the constitutional settlement and political conditions of Scotland is not only crass, it is symptomatic of an academic culture overly concerned with patrolling and defending the borders of its own institutional existence.

In a wider context, too close a relationship between academia and arts bureaucracy can lead to a deadening effect on cultural production: academics advise the Arts Council on which authors ought to receive funding; they likewise sit on judging panels of prominent prizes and in the past have reviewed new writing for periodicals. It is not, I think, to disparage their sincere efforts to suggest a very real danger exists that academia will exert a distorting influence on canon-formation when it comes to contemporary work. It will over-emphasise that which conforms to a particular theory, or favoured mode of discourse: a problem even further exacerbated when Literary Studies and Creative Writing become departmental bedfellows.

As for any notion of a 'new literary avant-garde', I remain deeply sceptical: a scepticism encouraged whenever I wonder what older avant-garde writers would have made of premature academic lionisation. Again, the porous nature of the boundaries between writer, creative writing tutor, arts bureaucrat and academic means that a system becomes merely self-perpetuating. That nebulous idea of the 'literary establishment' is often real enough when it comes to log-rolling and puff-providing. When I occasionally lecture to Creative Writing Students I offer them a sentence and ask them to find the mistake: a young author in a bar says to his friend 'I've asked my agent to speak to my editor to tell my publicist to have a word with my reviewer'. Reviewing is still independent from the business model of publishing. Perhaps academia should take a leaf from its book.